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AUTHOR Bohlken, Bob
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ABSTRACT

Intended for college-level instructors, this paper aims to establish behavioral objectives for listening or listening competencies and provide experiential learning to develop and assess those objectives and/or competencies. The paper begins with an overview which notes the lack of material on listening competencies in many college speech textbooks and the relegation of listening to the speech communication department. The paper then offers a list of 8 listening competencies for the student, including requiring the student: (1) to discriminate among a series of spoken words or numbers and immediately recall them for interpretation; (2) to demonstrate emphatic listening through questioning; (3) to demonstrate awareness of the listening process through writing, through selective perception, and message abstraction; (4) to demonstrate an awareness of the distinctions among facts, inferences, judgments, and between qualified and unqualified statements; and (5) to demonstrate an awareness of his/her interpersonal listening behavior. A number of specific exercises show how these skills may be developed and tested, among them: an exercise on word meaning discrimination, an exercise on listening to a message, a critical/comprehensive exercise, and an emphatic listing responses exercise. A four-item list of available standardized listening tests concludes the paper. (Each section contains references.) (TB)

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Learning to Listen through Experiences: Developing Listening Competencies

Presented by

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Speech Communication
Northwest Missouri State University
Maryville, MO 64468

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Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Learning to Listen Through the Experiential Method

Because listening is a receptive language skill, diverse in nature and lacking in established teaching methods, listening is the orphan of the language skills within the formal education systems. Textbooks stress the importance of good listening skills and what creates "bad" listening habits. There are few, if any texts that establish listening competencies or behavioral objectives for college level students, let alone describing how these competencies can be developed. Listening within the college curriculum appears to be part of the speech communication department's responsibility and in most cases given cursory attention as a unit in the basic course taught by instructors who have no training in listening. In a recent study survey of 50 colleges and universities conducted by Katherine Wacker[1] only twenty-seven responded and of those responding twenty-three offered a course in listening. These results indicate that the "listening" that is taught at the college level is taught in the basic speech course as further evidenced by the fact that the five most commonly used speech texts contain at least one chapter on listening.

The purpose of this paper is to establish behavioral objectives for listening or listening competencies and provide experiential learning to develop and assess those objectives and/or competencies.

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[1] Wacker, Katherine. MA Thesis Texas Tech University 1994

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Developing Listening Competencies in the Basic College Speech Course
Behavioral Objectives

1. The student will discriminate a series of spoken words and immediately recall them for semantic interpretation.

2. The student will discriminate a series of spoken numerical values and immediately recall them for numerical association and interpretation.

3. The student will demonstrate empathetic listening through the responses of questioning, paraphrasing and mirroring (repeating) a personally spoken message.

4. The student will demonstrate the awareness of the listening process variables in a written composition.

5. The student will demonstrate an awareness of the listening process in selective perception and message abstraction.

6. The student will demonstrate an awareness of the distinction among facts, inferences, judgment.

7. The student will demonstrate an awareness of the distinction between qualified, hypothetical statements and unqualified statements.

8. The student will demonstrate an awareness of his/her interpersonal listening behavior and the purposes for listening.

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Word Meaning Discrimination

Objective: Listener will discriminate and process words' meanings with immediate responses.

Procedure: Reader will read a series of words and ask the listener three questions about the series.

(1) Coat, cap, orange gloves, boots

1. The word whose referent does not fit the concept category of the others is _____?
2. The word in the series representing the largest item is _____?
3. The two words in the series that are plural are?
   _____ _____

(2) Mouse, cat, snake, rat, dogs

1. What two words in the series rhyme?
2. The word whose referent does not fit the concept category of the others is?
3. What word is plural?

(3) Television, radio, newspaper, telephone, telegram

1. The word whose referent does not fit the concept category of the others is?
2. The fourth word of the series is?
3. What three words begin with T, E, L?

(4) Listening, reading, hearing, writing, speaking

1. The fourth word in the series is?
2. The word whose referent does not fit the category of others is?
3. What two words represent expressive skills?

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Think About to Whom and Why You Listen!

Goal: To create an awareness of the importance of listening behavior in interpersonal communication or everyday life - an introduction to a unit on interpersonal listening.

Listening, "the orphan of the language arts" according to Wolvin/Coakley (1988), has gained at least a "unit" recognition in most college basic speech courses, but the importance of interpersonal listening and its relationship with everyday communication receives limited attention. The lack of attention given listening in the basic course is due primarily "to lack of awareness on the parts of both instructors (at Northwest no instructor has had formal listening training) and students, and the lack of activities that create listening awareness." (Bohlken 1994)

In the basic course, one multifaceted way of introducing the listening unit, relating it to the interpersonal communication unit and creating an awareness of listening, is through a self inventory questionnaire, a discussion of the results of the inventory and an interview assignment. After the students take the inventory and we discuss it in class, I give them the assignment to interview five other students using the self inventory questions. They are to report their findings in a three hundred word written composition.

To give you some idea of how our basic course students responded, the following data are provided. It is interesting to note that the vast majority, over 90%, of the 300+ Northwest Missouri State University basic speech course students surveyed over the past five years, indicate that their "friend" is their most "effective listener" (question #1) and perceive that they listen most effectively to a "friend." (question #3) When asked why they listen to "this person" (item #4) over 80% replied "he/she listens to me." These data indicate that perceived effective interpersonal listening is reciprocal. When asked question #5, "What communication skill do you admire most about your friends (speaking, listening, writing, reading)?" over 90% stated "listening."

In regard to listeners' responses to questions #2 and #6, "eye contact" is by far the most common answer, but "asks questions" is also a common reply. It is interesting to note that one nonverbal (eye contact) and one verbal (asks questions) are common replies.

When asked, "what distracts you most from listening?" (both to parent and friend, question #7) the most common responses are "topic of conversation," "own preoccupation" and "lack of purpose." An interesting note is that "lack of time," although it is not a prompt, is a common response. Also interesting to note is that listeners in interpersonal communication take the responsibility for distractions; whereas, in classroom lecture listening, the most common perceived distracter is the "lecturer" or speaker. (Bohlken 1994)

Questions #8, 9, 10 are intended to motivate the students to think about and compare their interpersonal communication with their parents and friends. The students' common responses to #8 are "twice a week" and "seldom." The students perceive they listen more in conversations with parents than with friends. It is obvious that incoming freshman students spend more time communicating with friends, but the proportionate amount of time is interesting.

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Although we are tempted to generalize and speculate about data acquired from this inventory, we need to emphasize that the inventory is an instrument to create awareness of and interest in the important part listening plays in interpersonal communication and provide formal listening experiences. Additional "teaching listening" exercises may be found in Experiential Listening edited by Carolyn Coakley and Andrew Wolvin, Spectra, Auburn, AL. 1989.

Who Listens to Whom and Why

Objective: To create an awareness of the importance of listening in interpersonal communication.
Procedure: Instructor reads items listed below and has students respond with written answers. Upon completion of survey, results are discussed and compared. After the discussion students are given the questionnaire to interview (outside of class) five other students, to listen to their spoken responses and to present a compilation of findings in a 300-word written composition.

1. Who do you think listens most effectively to you? (parent, friend, teacher, brother/sister, etc.)
2. How do you know this person is listening effectively? (asks questions, rephrases my ideas, nods head, makes eye contact, etc.)
3. To whom do you listen most effectively? (parent, teacher, friend, sister/brother, etc.)
4. Why do you listen effectively to this person? (he/she listens to me, the topics discussed, our relationship, respect)
5. What communication skill do you admire most about your friends? (speaking, listening, writing, reading)
6. How do you respond when you are listening effectively? (eye contact, facial expression, nod, ask questions, rephrase message)
7. What distracts you most from listening to another person in a conversation? (other person's voice, speech rate, or appearance; topic; own interest or preoccupation; no purpose for listening)
8. When you were/are at home how often do you converse with your parents and/or entire family for at least a fifteen minute duration? (everyday, twice a week, once a week, seldom)
9. In your fifteen minute plus conversations with your parents, what percentage of the time do you listen?
10. In your fifteen minute plus conversations with your best friend, what percentage of the time do you listen?

REFERENCES

1. Wolvin, Andrew, Carolyn Coakley. Listening Wm. C. Brown, Dubuque, Iowa 1988

2. Bohlken, Bob. Paper presented at International Listening Association Conference, Boston 1994

3. Bohlken, Bob. "Learning to Listen as you Listen to Learn" The Speech Communication Teacher, Winter 1994

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Listening to a Message
Exercise

Goal: To introduce and describe semantic and linguistic elements of a verbal message that influence critical/comprehensive listening.

This short message listening experience introduces and provides an opportunity to discuss the process of abstracting, attribution, unfamiliar vocabulary, immediate and relevant information, repeated concepts, highly connotative concepts, content words and fact/inference/judgement as they apply to critical comprehensive listening.

In the use of this experiential method, the process of "abstracting" has been demonstrated by the student's reduction of a 168-word message to an average twenty four words, about 15 percent of the original message. (Bohlken 1994)

Fewer than ten percent of the student listeners comprehended the suppositious/abstract attributions of the message. The initial phrase "Someone told me..." and near the message closing phrase, "I believe I overheard someone say ..." very rarely appear in the student listeners' abstracts. Student listeners should learn to evaluate the source of the message and note hear-say or conditional statements.

The element of "vocabulary" is demonstrated by the fact that fewer than five percent of student listeners respond with all six adjectives (attractive, voluptuous, sensuous, adroit, puerile, young) presented in the first statement of the message. The student listeners usually use one or two adjectives ("attractive" and "young"). Two other unfamiliar words "sagacious" and "matriculated" are consistently omitted in ninety percent of the responding messages. It is appropriate to point out that listeners need to rely on verbal context for meanings of words they don't know, but in some cases, as with the six adjectives in succession, the context is of little value.

The elements of immediacy/relevancy are usually indicated by the fact that the student listeners' response messages make reference to Emily's father having graduated from "this school" but they will not note his current occupation. Another element of immediacy/relevancy is the use of direct address. "You should welcome her" is usually responded to in a majority of replies. The statement about "Miss Teenage America" usually is noted but the date---"a few years ago," and the honor--- "first runner-up," are usually dropped.

The element of highly connotative concepts, "red flag words" is demonstrated by what some would call "sexist" references. The four references, "Lady," "Chick-a-dee," "Babe," and "Knockout" are often reported in the student response messages especially by females. Of the references none appears to be reported more than others and usually two will be noted.

The element of content/function words may be demonstrated by the students counting the number of function words (prepositions, conjunctions, articles and linking verbs) and the number of content words (those words having a semantic referent-nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) that they have in their response message. There are thirty five function words (21%) in the original message. Usually, the student response messages

have fewer than that percentage indicating they listen for concepts rather than relationships of concepts.

The use of this message provides an excellent experiential method for introducing seven linguistic/semantic elements of critical/comprehensive listening and the distinction between fact, inference, and judgment.

* The quiz over fact/inference/judgment creates much discussion. Confusion occurs when the perspective changes from what the message said, and the listener's own viewpoint. For example, the message stated as a fact that "the class will benefit" but most listeners indicate this is a judgment from their perspective.

Other critical/comprehensive exercises may be found in Building Active Listening Skills. Judi Brownell, Prentice Hall 1986.

References

Bohlken, Bob. Paper presented at International Listening Association conference, Boston 1994.

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Critical / Comprehensive Listening Exercise

Procedure: (1) Instructor reads the following announcement at a rate of approximately 140 words per minute.

Someone told me that a very attractive, voluptuous, sensuous, adroit, puerile, young lady will join our class next Wednesday (give inaccurate date). Her name is Emily George and her measurements are 36-27-34. Emily George is the daughter of a graduate of this school (give name of school) and he is now with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This babe was first runner-up in the Miss Teenage America contest a few years ago, and she is a real knockout. Emily George is a very sagacious Jewish girl who matriculated at a Catholic school in Arlington, Virginia before coming here. We should welcome the "Chick-a-dee" because we will benefit from her presence. I believe I overheard someone say that the Emily George family is going to live on Kerpotcan Avenue. You should welcome her when she arrives.

(2) Instructor requests that student listeners write down the contents of the message.

(3) Instructor reads the following exercise:

From the message you just listened to, you are to respond to the following by writing down whether the statements I will read are either facts, inferences, or judgments.

(F) 1. The message referred to a female human.
(I) 2. The person's parents are named Mr. and Mrs. George.
(I) 3. The person in the message graduated from a Catholic elementary school.
(J) 4. The person is beautiful.
(J) 5. The person has an attractive physique.
(I) 6. The person's parents live on Kerpotcan Avenue.
(F) 7. According to the message, the class will benefit from the person's presence.
(F) 8. The person was a runner-up in Miss Teenage America.
(I) 9. The person is under twenty years old.
(F) 10. The person's father works for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

(3) Discuss the process of abstracting, message source attribution, effects of unfamiliar vocabulary, influence of information's, immediacy/relevancy and repetition of concepts, influence of highly connotative words and content/function words ratio, and the distinction among fact/inference/judgment.

(4) Request that students count the number of words in each of their messages and the number of function words.

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Discriminating Listening and Mental Processing

Objective: Listener will discriminate and process mathematical concepts for immediate response.

Procedure: Reader will read a series of 5 numbers, pause, and ask listener three questions about the series responded to on paper.

(1) In the series of numbers 2 4 7 6 8
1. What is the fourth number?
2. What is the only odd number?
3. What is the sum of the first two numbers?

(2) In the series of numbers 1 7 3 2 7
1. Which number is repeated?
2. What is the only even number presented?
3. Is the sum of the first three numbers greater than the sum of the last two?

(3) In the series of numbers 8 6 10 4 2
1. Which number is out of sequence?
2. What is the second to the last number given?
3. What is the sum of the first and last numbers?

(4) In the series of numbers 6 8 4 3 2
1. What is the third number of the series?
2. What is the largest number?
3. What is the smallest number?

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Empathetic Listening Responses

Although Wolvin and Coakley are reluctant to include verbal responding to a person's message as a part of the listening process, it is evident that responding is an important element in the communication process, especially in interpersonal relationships. For our purposes we call it "empathetic listening." Empathetic listening involves perceiving the speaker's feeling and identifying and relating with those feelings. The empathetic responses are predominantly nonverbal but the three verbal responses include (1) questioning, (2) paraphrasing and (3) mirroring (repeating). The best way to learn to respond empathetically is through real life but partially scripted experiences. The experiences are focused on topics or subjects that are relevant to university students and communication.

Objective: The student will respond appropriately (as judged by a third peer) to a personal verbal message by (1) asking questions, (2) paraphrasing, (3) mirroring.

Procedure: Divide the class into groups of three. Give each person a set of three message cues from those listed below. Each person will develop a one to two minute message from the cues given him/her. Participant #1 presents his/her message, #2 respond appropriately by two questions, paraphrasing, or mirroring. Participant #3 evaluates the responses. Participants exchange roles and responsibilities.

1. The communication situation which makes me most anxious is.... I think I dread it most because.... When I am in this situation, I ....

2. These class meetings are.... I think we need to.... During and after these meetings I feel....

3. I think my studies are going well this semester except for.... I feel this class.... I wish....

4. I really like.... He/she makes me feel.... When he/she is around, I know....

5. I have a difficult time knowing what to do when.... I talk to myself about.... I wish....

6. I am most embarrassed in class when.... I wish.... Perhaps, I should....

7. I think_____ is the best listener I know. I know he/she is listening to me because.... I can tell he/she is....

8. I have the most difficult time listening when.... ....also bothers my listening. I think the ideal listening situation would include....

9. I listen best when.... ....influences my listening. About listening, I think....

REFERENCES

Wolvin, Andrew, Carolyn Coakley. Listening, Wm. C. Brown, Dubuque, Iowa 1987.

Bob Bohlken, Ph.D.
Prof. of Communication
Northwest Missouri State University

Standardized Tests for Listening Competencies

"Watson-Barker Listening Test" Spectra, P.O. Box 5031, Contract Station 20, New Orleans, LA 70118

Test was developed in 1987 and revised in 1993. It measures (1) evaluating message content, (2) understanding meaning in conversations, (3) understanding and remembering lecture information, (4) evaluating emotional meaning and (5) following instructions and directions. Test is presented in video with scenario followed questions presented both audibly and visually. Self score answer sheets are available. Two different tests (From A and Form B) are available.

"Steinbrecher-Willmington Listening Test" Milda Steinbrecher Communication Department, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Oshkosh, WI 54901

Test was developed and produced in 1992. It measures (1) listening to comprehend, (2) listening to critically evaluate, (3) listening empathetically, (4) recognizing communication principles. The test is presented in video with scenarios followed by questions presented audibly and visually. Self score answer sheets are available.

"Kentucky (Robert Bostrom) Comprehensive Listening Test," The Kentucky Listening Research Center, P.O. Box 555, Lexington, Kentucky.

Test was developed in 1990. It measures (1) listening with short-term retention, (2) short-term retention with rehearsal, (3) interpretive listening, (4) listening comprehension of short lecture, (5) focus listening overcoming distractions. The test is presented in audio only scenarios followed by printed answer sheet. Computer scored answer sheets available. Only one form of the test is available.

"Listening Lecture Comprehension" (Rebecca Rubin) Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Road, Suite E, Annandale, VA 22003

Test was developed in 1982. It is part of the Communication Competence Assessment Instrument and it measures lecture comprehension in regard to (1) recognizing a fact, (2) following directions, (3) identification of main ideas, (4) summarizing ideas. An evaluation form which has printed questions calls for oral responses.